MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA
MONSTRESS™
THE FUTURE OF COMICS
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image
EST. 1992
ISSUE 12

THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

On the Isle of Bones, Maika came face-to-face with the Blood Fox, a terrifying and powerful Ancient who agreed to give Maika some of the answers she sought. To her dismay, Maika learned that her mother, Moriko, had deliberately conceived Maika with the last living descendent of the Shaman-Empress so that her daughter would be born with the blood of the Shaman-Empress flowing through her veins — and a Monstrum hidden beneath her skin. According to the Fox, Maika must now find the remaining pieces of the Shaman-Empress's mask if she hopes to control and survive the Monstrum's influence.

When Maika refused to free the Fox in exchange for this information, he attacked her — and the glamour he used to control the island's populace began to crumble. As Maika and her companions struggled to escape the Fox and his disintegrating empire, another terrible truth was revealed: the skeleton that makes up the Isle of Bones once belonged to a Monstrum named Hajin — a Monstrum who was murdered by Zinn, the Monstrum inside of Maika.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh. In her current possession are two clues to her past: a photograph, and a fragment of a mask that many would kill to possess.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

REN An enigmatic nekomancer cat with mysterious motives, he is one of Maika's companions on her journey, and perhaps an agent of the Dusk Court — or some greater power.

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

MORIKO Maika's mother, an Arcanic, whose obsession with uncovering the secrets of the greatest Arcanic ancestor, the Shaman-Empress, led to her betrayal and murder. Her reputation as a woman of single-minded drive and intellectual brilliance has only grown since her death.

LORD ROHAR THE INSATIABLE A powerful Ancient, also known as the Blood Fox, who was exiled to the Isle of Bones thousands of years ago in the wake of his attempted Arcanic genocide. He uses a glamour to exert control over all who have the misfortune to land on the island and spends most of his time feeding his addiction to the highs brought on by powdered Monstrum marrow.

I CAN SMELL THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS BENEATH YOUR SKIN. THREE THOUSAND YEARS AND I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN THAT STENCH.
SHE MADE THIS CHAIN THAT BINDS ME, CREATED THIS BLASTED PRISON...BECAUSE SHE KNEW... SHE KNEW... ONE DAY IT WOULD BE NEEDED.
THAT INFERNAL WITCH TOOK HER REVENGE FROM THE GRAVE...

...FOOL...
...THE FOX... IS PLAYING... WITH YOUR MIND...
...YOU ARE... WHOLE... YOU HAVE NOT YET... BEEN DAMAGED...
...DO NOT SUCCUMB... TO ILLUSIONS... YOU WRETCHED... CHILD --
FIVE YEARS AGO, I FELT YOUR BLOOD AWAKEN. THE WHOLE WORLD FELT IT.
...AND THIS ISLAND SHOOK AND THE BONES CRACKED OPEN...
...IN THE AFTERMATH, I DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF THE GODS.
AAH!
SSLLSHH
MY... FLESH...!
NOT ONLY ARE YOU INFERNAL DEMONS MORTAL...
...YOU'RE USEFUL WHEN YOU'RE DEAD.
GET OUT... OF MY FUCKING... MIND...
NNNGH! WHY ARE YOU RUNNING? I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL AN ILLUSION!
...MY BLOOD... IS... REAL...
...THE FOX... HAS COVERED... HIS CLAWS... IN THE BONES... OF MY KIND...
...AND... I AM... VULNERABLE...

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GODDESS, GET THE MONSTER OUT OF ME! GET HER OUT!
:GASP:
MAIKA... YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE...
...YOU KNOW WHO REALLY KILLED HER...
YOU SHOULD HAVE GIVEN ME SHARPER TEETH, YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE.
YOU'RE HIDING AGAIN. ONE SCRATCH AND YOU FALTER. SOME DEMON YOU ARE.
WHAT --
...I HAVE NEVER... KNOWN... THE COLOR... OF MY BLOOD... BUT IT... IS FITTING...
...I HAVE BEEN DELIVERED... TO THE SITE... OF MY TRANSGRESSION...
...HOW CAN I NOT... PAY... IN FLESH... AND PAIN...?
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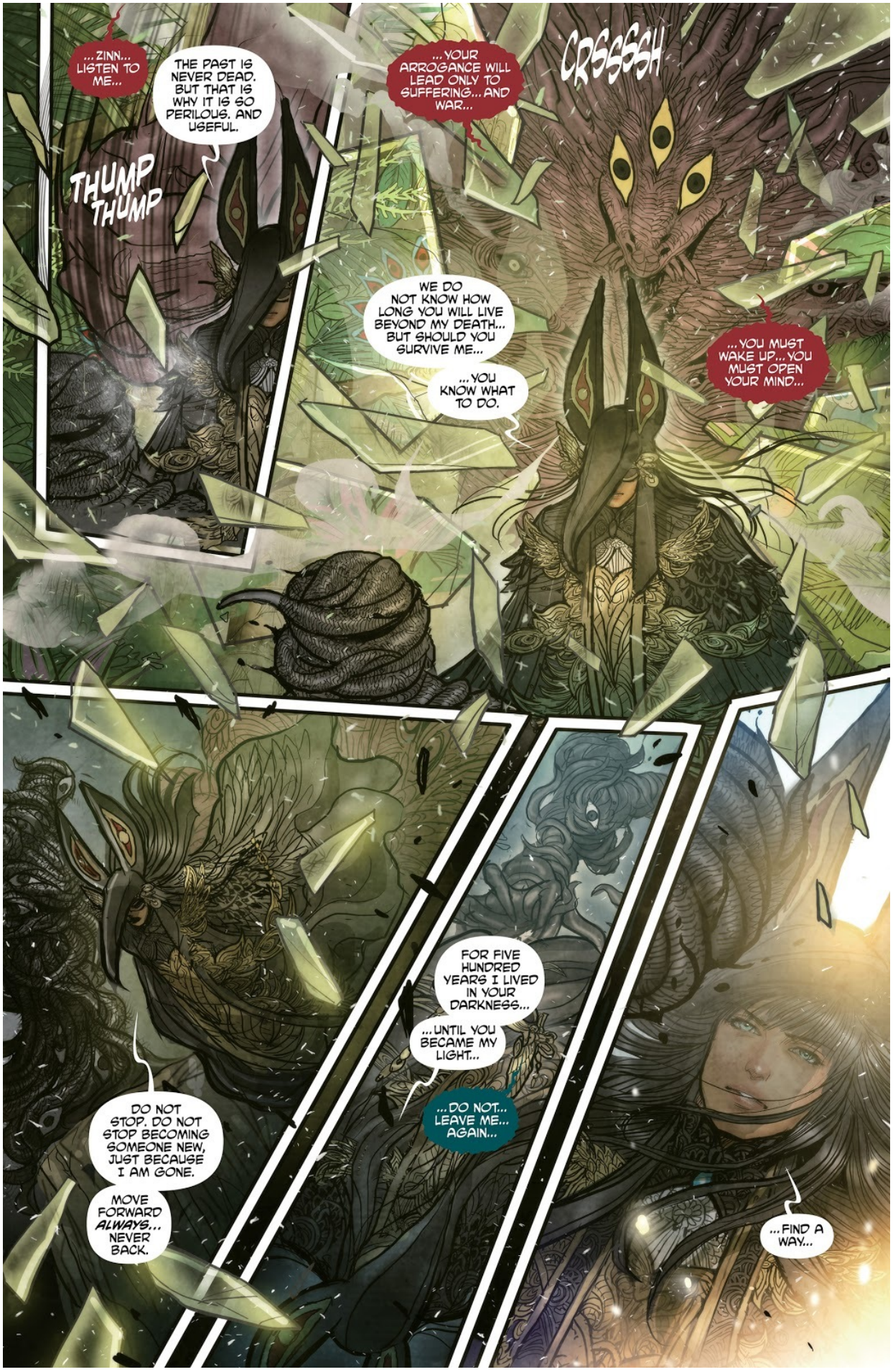
...WHAT... HAVE... I... DONE...?
...HOW COULD I... FORGET... HOW I BETRAYED... MY OWN...?
...WHAT... WAS... I...?
...WHO... AM... I...?
...PERHAPS... IT TRULY IS... TIME... FOR ME... TO DIE...
...I... DESERVE... IT...
THIS AGAIN?
YES, YOU MURDERED YOUR FRIEND. INDEED, YOU TRIED TO DESTROY ALL LIFE ON THIS WORLD.
AND YOUR ACTIONS MOST CERTAINLY LED TO THE IMPRISONMENT OF YOUR KIND.
YOU ARE THE VERY DEFINITION OF TREACHERY.

BUT GUILT IS SUCH A BORE, MY QUERIDO.
YOU WILL NEVER REDEEM YOURSELF.
BUT FOCUS ALWAYS ON YOUR SHAME, AND YOUR SHAME WILL EAT YOU. IT WILL BECOME YOU.
BELOVED...
THAT IS THE COWARD'S WAY.
A COWARD NEVER HAS TO LEARN.


...ZINN... LISTEN TO ME...
THE PAST IS NEVER DEAD. BUT THAT IS WHY IT IS SO PERILOUS. AND USEFUL.
THUMP THUMP
...YOUR ARROGANCE WILL LEAD ONLY TO SUFFERING... AND WAR...
CRSSSSH
WE DO NOT KNOW HOW LONG YOU WILL LIVE BEYOND MY DEATH... BUT SHOULD YOU SURVIVE ME...
...YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
...YOU MUST WAKE UP... YOU MUST OPEN YOUR MIND...
FOR FIVE HUNDRED YEARS I LIVED IN YOUR DARKNESS...
...UNTIL YOU BECAME MY LIGHT...
...DO NOT... LEAVE ME... AGAIN...
DO NOT STOP. DO NOT STOP BECOMING SOMEONE NEW, JUST BECAUSE I AM GONE.
MOVE FORWARD *ALWAYS*... NEVER BACK.
...FIND A WAY...

...YOU ASK...
...TOO MUCH...
...OF ME...
...WHAT I AM...
...CANNOT TRULY... CHANGE...
NNNGH!
...OH GODDESS...
WHAT ARE YOU FUCKING MUMBLING ABOUT?
AND WHY DO YOU LOOK LIKE THIS?
BECAUSE THE MONSTER WISHES TO CAST THE GREATEST ILLUSION OF ALL.
THAT IT IS ONE OF US.
BOOM!
DID IT AMUSE YOU, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO? TAKING OUR FORM, MOCKING US WITH YOUR PRESENCE AS YOU WALKED IN THE LIGHT AT THE SIDE OF YOUR MISTRESS?
OR DID YOU FEEL THE WEIGHT OF THE TERRIBLE LEASH THAT BOUND YOU TO MORTAL FLESH? EVEN AS YOU ARE BOUND NOW TO THIS REPULSIVE MONGREL?

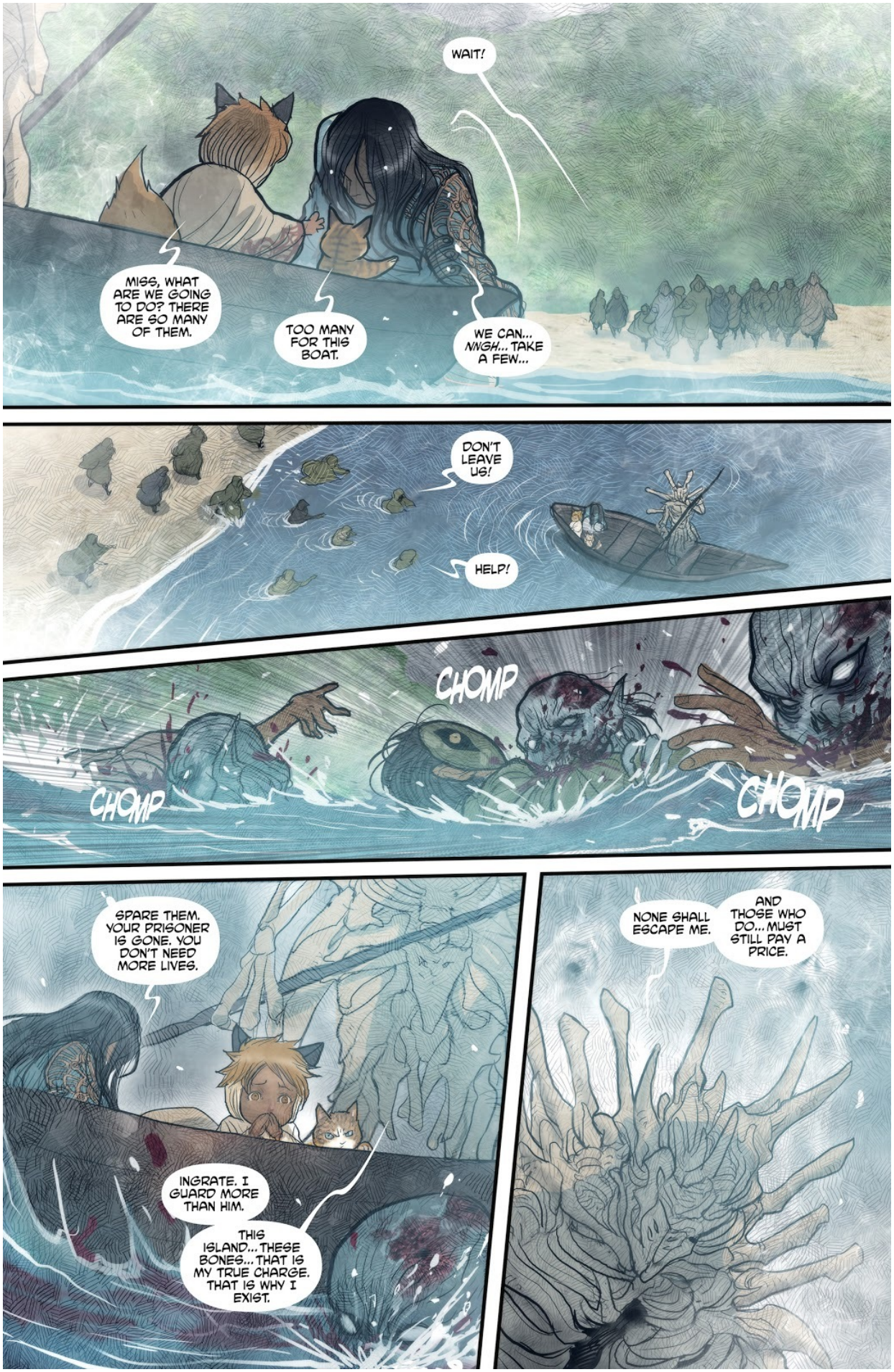
...THIS IS... NO... LEASH...
...IT IS... A PROMISE...
...AND YOU... ARE NOT STRONG... ENOUGH... TO BEAR WITNESS... TO THE FULL POWER... OF THAT... VOW...
BUT COME TRY US.
YOU AWFUL CREATURE. I HAVE NO DESIRE TO TAKE YOUR POWER.
WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE TRIED TO HARNESS THE BLOOD. WE SHOULD HAVE ELIMINATED IT ENTIRE --

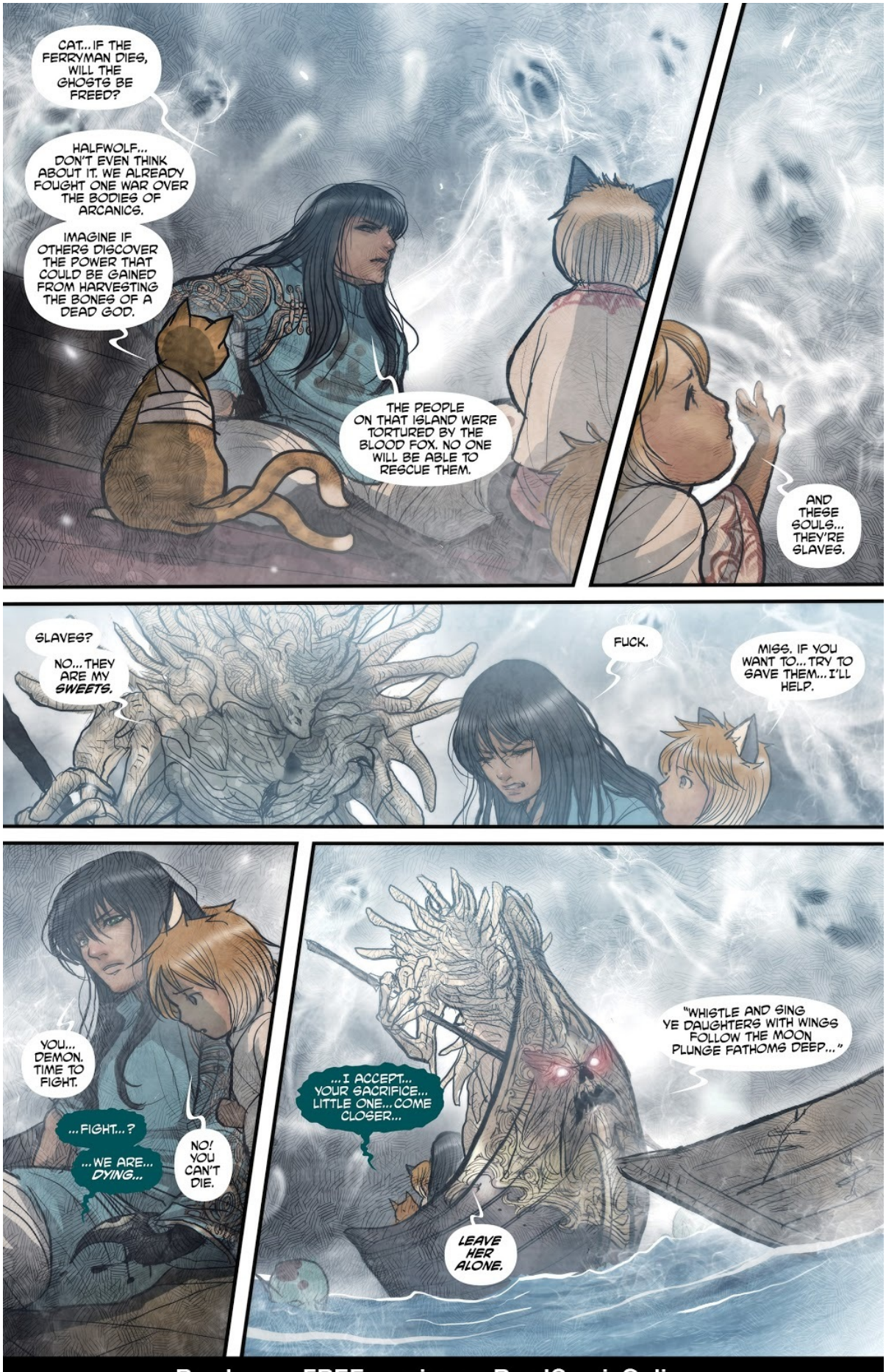
SSHHRRRIP
ǂGASPǂ
...EEEAAAGH...
...YOU...ARE... POISON...
...YOU ARE FILLED... WITH THE ESSENCE... OF THE CORPSE... YOU DEFILED...
HEH. MY FLESH DOES NOT PLEASE YOU?
...AND NOW I... AM DEFILED... FROM TASTING... THE FLESH...OF MY SISTER-BROTHER...
...WHY DOES DEFILEMENT... FEEL LIKE... MY SKIN IS ON FIRE...?
IT IS FITTING YOU CHOKE ON YOUR OWN... CONSIDERING YOUR KIND CONSUMED MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE WAR...
...BUT HOW CURIOUS THAT YOUR MONGREL HOST APPEARS TO SHARE YOUR NEW WEAKNESS...
YOU ARE A POOR INCARNATION OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS.
YOU'RE THE ONE IN CHAINS, FATHERFUCKER.
SSHHRRIP
AHHH!
AHHH!
YOU ARE AN OATHBREAKER, JUST LIKE YOUR MOTHER. IF YOU WILL NOT FREE ME FROM THIS CHAIN...
...PERHAPS I WILL BE ABLE TO BREAK IT MYSELF... IF I CONSUME THE FLESH OF THE MONSTER INSIDE YOU...
I'M CLOSE! I'M -- MMPH -- SO VERY CLOSE TO HAVING -- MMMPH -- THE STRENGTH!
CCRRNNCH
...NO...

Mother.
Was it worth it for you?
Was I everything you desired?
DAMN IT! WHERE IS HE?!
BEHIND... BE...HIND...
Or was I just a piece in a greater game?
NNGH!
I'M COMING, MISS!
I CAN SMELL HIM!
GET AWAY FROM THEM!
HEH.
CLEVER CREATURE.

It matters.
CLEVER, BUT ANNOYING.
WHUMP
EEP!
NNGH!
You're gone.
YOU FIRST.
DIE.
And I'm here. Paying the price for your choices.
...I...CAN TELL YOU...WHERE THE REST...OF THE MASK...IS...
...AND THE NAME...OF YOUR...FATHER...
I will never stop paying.
SNAP
GLRG
YOU'VE TOLD ME ENOUGH.
I WAS WRONG TO COME HERE.
...MAY THE BELOVED...CHASE YOUR SOUL...INTO THE ABYSS...

HHSSSSSSS
WHAM
MISS!
DEMON, STAND, OR GET BACK INTO MY BODY. WE NEED TO MOVE, NOW.
WE MUST BE CERTAIN...
YES. HE'S TRULY DEAD.
THE OTHER ANCIENTS WILL HAVE FELT HIS PASSING.
GOOD. FUCK THEM ALL.
LICK LICK
YOU BROKE THE FIRST SEAL! SNAPPED THE BONES. MY PRISONER IS DEAD.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
"COME ALL YE YOUNG WOMEN TO THE BONE BEACH GRAVE OH HAIL, OH HAIL... ALL WHO CRAVE THE BLADE YE MUST PAY, YE MUST PAY..."
REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE, FERRYMAN!
MAKE ONE MISTAKE, MORTAL, AND I WILL SPEAR YOUR SOUL UPON THE PROW OF MY SHIP.


WAIT!
MISS, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO? THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM.
TOO MANY FOR THIS BOAT.
WE CAN... NNGH... TAKE A FEW...
DON'T LEAVE US!
HELP!
CHOMP
CHOMP
CHOMP
SPARE THEM. YOUR PRISONER IS GONE. YOU DON'T NEED MORE LIVES.
INGRATE. I GUARD MORE THAN HIM.
THIS ISLAND... THESE BONES... THAT IS MY TRUE CHARGE. THAT IS WHY I EXIST.
NONE SHALL ESCAPE ME.
AND THOSE WHO DO... MUST STILL PAY A PRICE.


CAT... IF THE FERRYMAN DIES, WILL THE GHOSTS BE FREED?
HALFWOLF... DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT. WE ALREADY FOUGHT ONE WAR OVER THE BODIES OF ARCANICS.
IMAGINE IF OTHERS DISCOVER THE POWER THAT COULD BE GAINED FROM HARVESTING THE BONES OF A DEAD GOD.
THE PEOPLE ON THAT ISLAND WERE TORTURED BY THE BLOOD FOX. NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO RESCUE THEM.
AND THESE SOULS... THEY'RE SLAVES.
SLAVES?
NO... THEY ARE MY SWEETS.
FUCK.
MISS. IF YOU WANT TO... TRY TO SAVE THEM... I'LL HELP.
YOU... DEMON. TIME TO FIGHT.
...FIGHT...?
...WE ARE... DYING...
NO! YOU CAN'T DIE.
...I ACCEPT... YOUR SACRIFICE... LITTLE ONE... COME CLOSER...
"WHISTLE AND SING YE DAUGHTERS WITH WINGS FOLLOW THE MOON PLUNGE FATHOMS DEEP..."
LEAVE HER ALONE.

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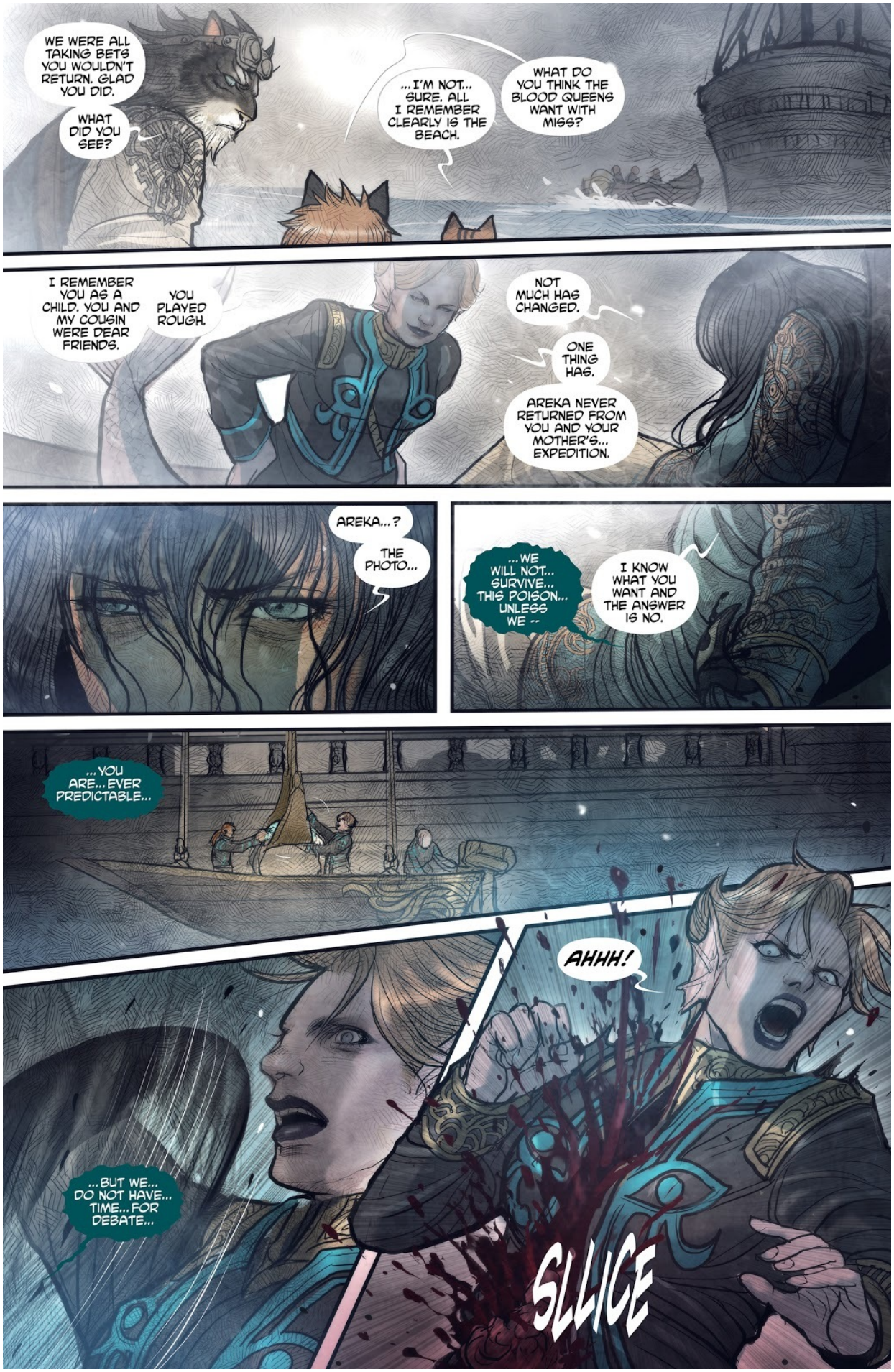
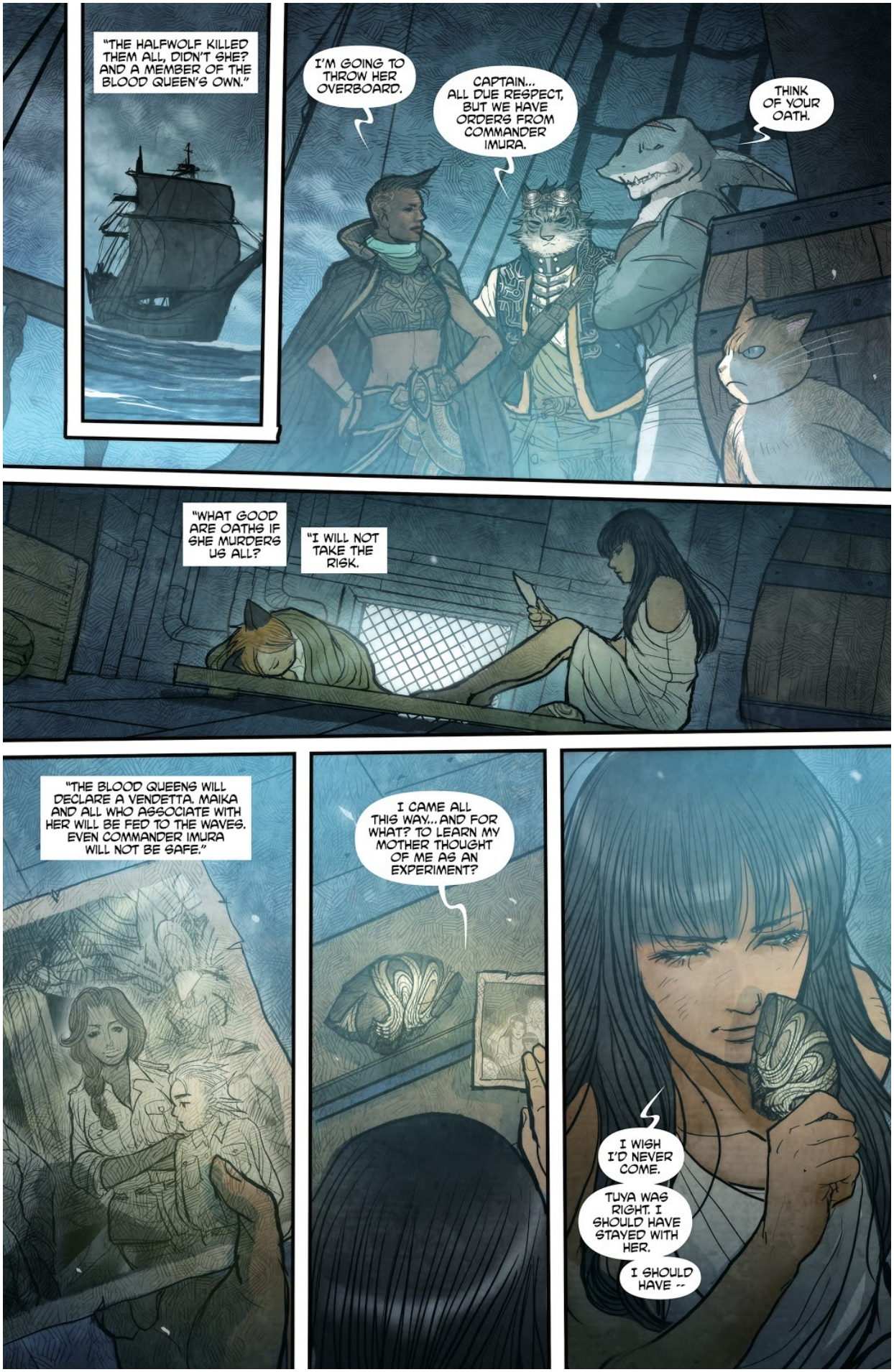
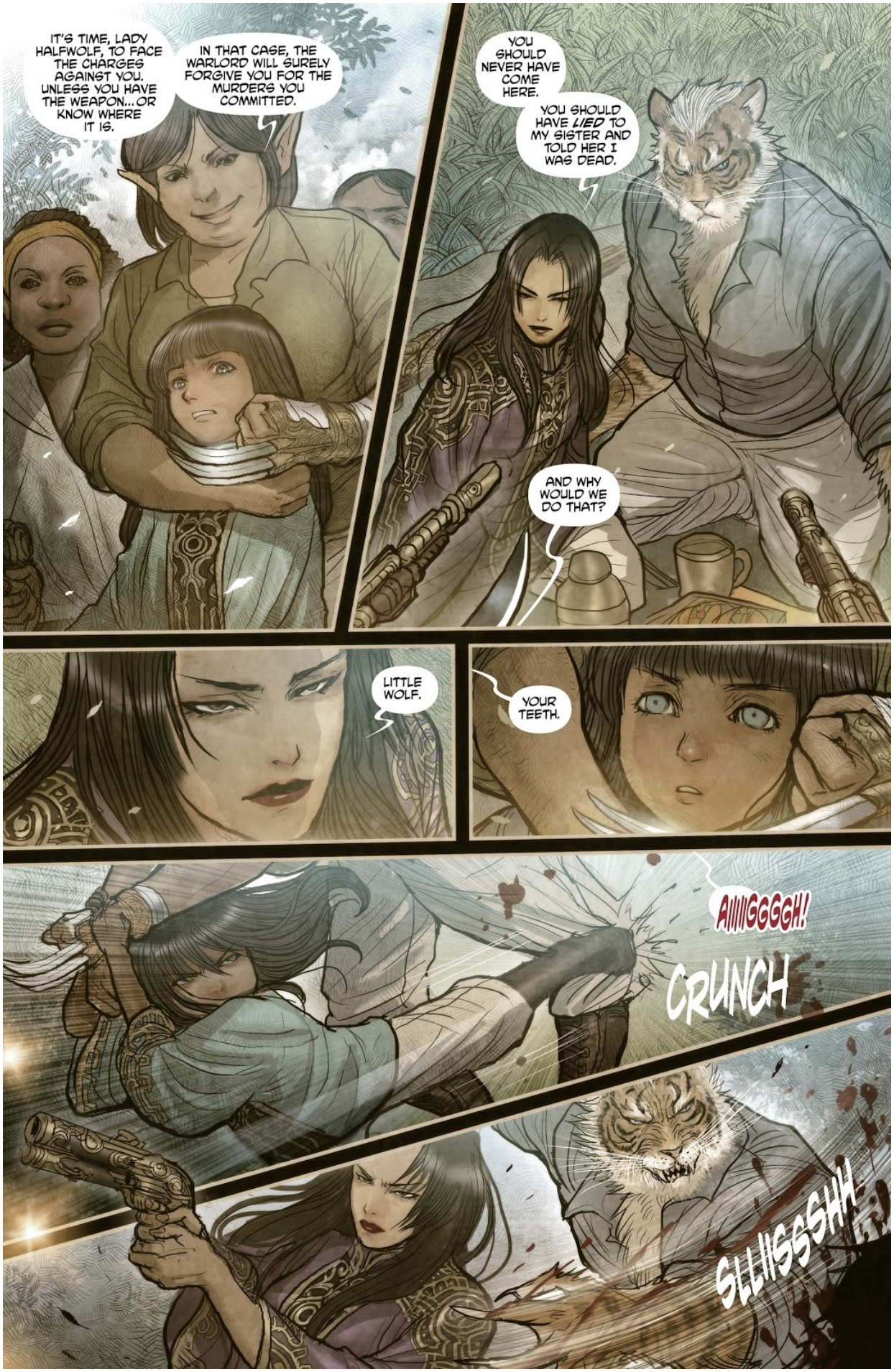
THIS ISN'T OVER. ONE DAY I'LL END YOU.
ONLY MY CREATOR CAN UNDO ME, HALFWIT. BUT PLEASE DO RETURN. I WOULD DEARLY LOVE TO SUP ON YOUR SOUL.
OH, NO... NO. NO. NO...
MASTER REN?
WHAT IS IT, CAT?
TELL ME... THERE WAS A CITY ON THAT ISLAND, WASN'T THERE? WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?
I... I THINK THERE WAS. BUT IT'S ALL... FUZZY...
MAIKA HALFWOLF!
IS THAT YOU?
THANK GODDESS THE MISTS ARE LIFTING!
LADY HALFWOLF. I'M PLEASED TO FIND YOU LOOKING MOSTLY ALIVE. WE FEARED THE WORST.
I AM CAPTAIN ELISANDRA, AT YOUR SERVICE. MY AUNTS, THE BLOOD QUEENS, HAVE REQUESTED YOUR PRESENCE AT THE CITADEL.
FORGIVE ME IF I DON'T GIVE A FUCK.
FORGIVEN.


WE WERE ALL TAKING BETS YOU WOULDN'T RETURN. GLAD YOU DID.
WHAT DID YOU SEE?
...I'M NOT... SURE. ALL I REMEMBER CLEARLY IS THE BEACH.
WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BLOOD QUEENS WANT WITH MISS?
I REMEMBER YOU AS A CHILD. YOU AND MY COUSIN WERE DEAR FRIENDS.
YOU PLAYED ROUGH.
NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED.
ONE THING HAS.
AREKA NEVER RETURNED FROM YOU AND YOUR MOTHER'S... EXPEDITION.
AREKA...?
THE PHOTO...
...WE WILL NOT... SURVIVE... THIS POISON... UNLESS WE --
I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT AND THE ANSWER IS NO.
...YOU ARE... EVER PREDICTABLE...
AHHH!
...BUT WE... DO NOT HAVE... TIME... FOR DEBATE...
SLICE

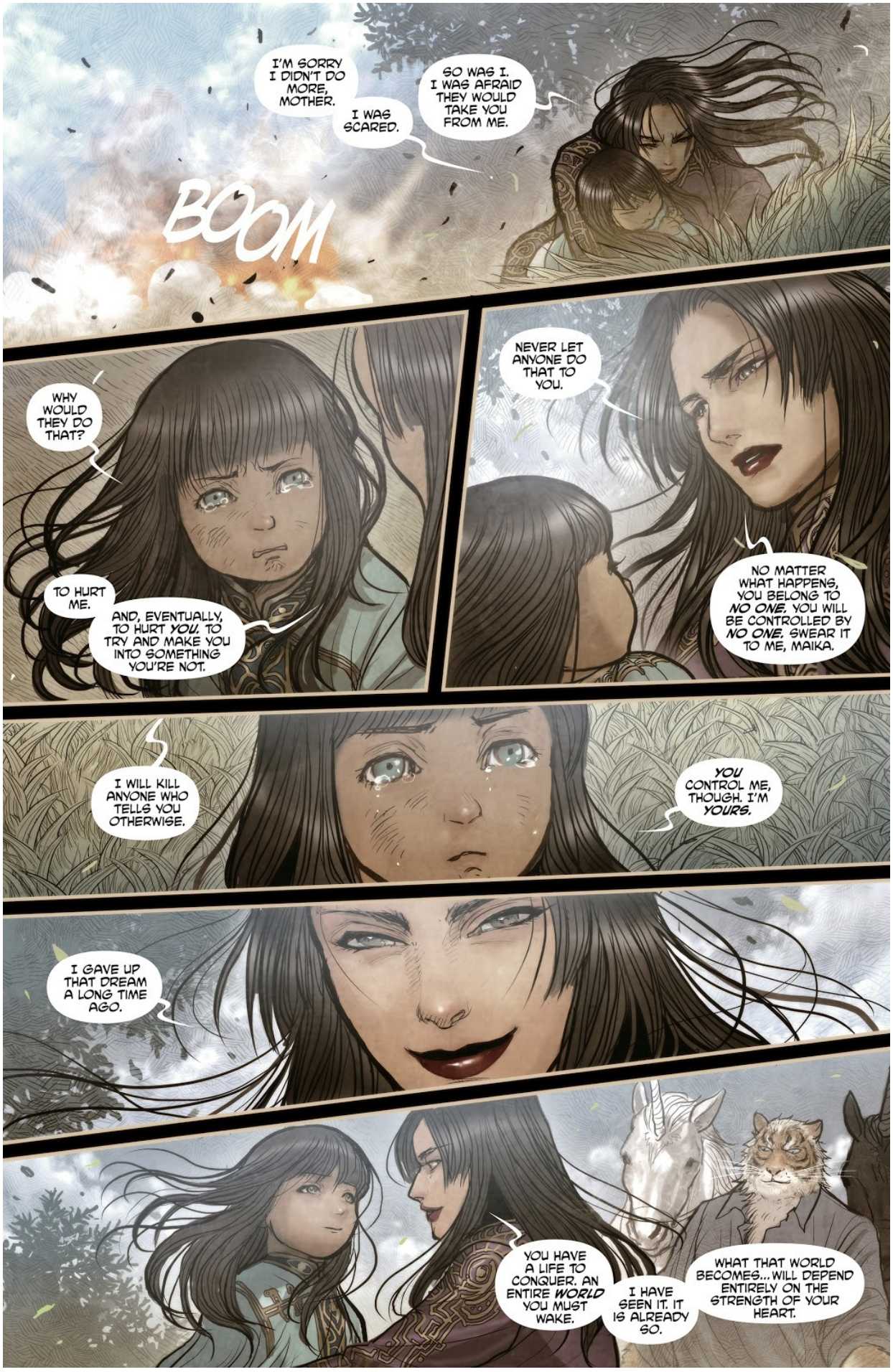
AHHH!
AGHH!!
ARRGH!!
AIIEEE!
OH, MISS.
YOU KILLED THEM ALL. EVERY LAST ONE.
...NO...IT IS *WE*...IT IS *US*...WHO FED...
DOESN'T IT MATTER TO YOU? IS EVERY LIFE BUT YOURS SO FUCKING WORTHLESS?
...SURVIVAL... IS NOT... GENTLE...
...MERCY... IS FOR THE... WEAK...
IS THAT WHY YOU MURDERED YOUR FRIEND?
IS THAT WHAT YOU WHISPERED TO THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS?
YOU SAID YOU WEREN'T HER SLAVE...BUT MAYBE SHE WAS YOURS. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO TURN *HER* INTO A MURDERER?


"THE HALFWOLF KILLED THEM ALL, DIDN'T SHE? AND A MEMBER OF THE BLOOD QUEEN'S OWN."
I'M GOING TO THROW HER OVERBOARD.
CAPTAIN... ALL DUE RESPECT, BUT WE HAVE ORDERS FROM COMMANDER IMURA.
THINK OF YOUR OATH.
"WHAT GOOD ARE OATHS IF SHE MURDERS US ALL?
"I WILL NOT TAKE THE RISK.
"THE BLOOD QUEENS WILL DECLARE A VENDETTA. MAIKA AND ALL WHO ASSOCIATE WITH HER WILL BE FED TO THE WAVES. EVEN COMMANDER IMURA WILL NOT BE SAFE."
I CAME ALL THIS WAY... AND FOR WHAT? TO LEARN MY MOTHER THOUGHT OF ME AS AN EXPERIMENT?
I WISH I'D NEVER COME.
TUYA WAS RIGHT. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH HER.
I SHOULD HAVE --

GASP
IT'S YOUR FAULT, YOU KNOW. YOU COULD HAVE JUST COME HOME WHEN YOU WERE SUMMONED INSTEAD OF BEING HUNTED LIKE AN ANIMAL.


IT'S TIME, LADY HALFWOLF, TO FACE THE CHARGES AGAINST YOU. UNLESS YOU HAVE THE WEAPON... OR KNOW WHERE IT IS.
IN THAT CASE, THE WARLORD WILL SURELY FORGIVE YOU FOR THE MURDERS YOU COMMITTED.
YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE COME HERE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE *LIED* TO MY SISTER AND TOLD HER I WAS DEAD.
AND WHY WOULD WE DO THAT?
LITTLE WOLF.
YOUR TEETH.
AIIIIGGGGH!
CRUNCH
SLLIISSHH

WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU...?
...YOU'RE TOO STRONG...
SLLASHH
MY SISTER WILL NEVER HAVE MY SECRETS.
SLLASHH
SHE'S TOO WEAK TO HOLD THEM.
SLLASHH
THE REST ARE DEAD. WE ARE FORTUNATE YOUR SISTER DID NOT SEND A LARGER SQUAD.
HERE. I FOUND THIS ON ONE OF THEM.
AIIEE!
WHEN THE WARLORD -- ♯PANT♯ -- FINDS OUT -- ♯PANT♯ -- YOU HAVE A DAUGHTER --
WHO WILL TELL HER?
MRPH!


I'M SORRY I DIDN'T DO MORE, MOTHER.
I WAS SCARED.
SO WAS I. I WAS AFRAID THEY WOULD TAKE YOU FROM ME.
BOOM
WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT?
TO HURT ME.
AND, EVENTUALLY, TO HURT *YOU*. TO TRY AND MAKE YOU INTO SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT.
NEVER LET ANYONE DO THAT TO YOU.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, YOU BELONG TO *NO ONE*. YOU WILL BE CONTROLLED BY *NO ONE*. SWEAR IT TO ME, MAIKA.
I WILL KILL ANYONE WHO TELLS YOU OTHERWISE.
YOU CONTROL ME, THOUGH. I'M *YOURS*.
I GAVE UP THAT DREAM A LONG TIME AGO.
YOU HAVE A LIFE TO CONQUER. AN ENTIRE *WORLD* YOU MUST WAKE.
I HAVE SEEN IT. IT IS ALREADY SO.
WHAT THAT WORLD BECOMES... WILL DEPEND ENTIRELY ON THE STRENGTH OF YOUR HEART.

AND YOUR HEART, MY LITTLE WOLF, IS VERY STRONG.

ELSEWHERE.
FATHER, PERHAPS TOMORROW WE SHOULD...
...OH, GODDESS...
FATHER? WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU'RE BLEEDING.
IT IS THE MASK.
SHE MUST HAVE SOMEHOW FOUND THE STRENGTH TO PUT IT ON. HOW VERY STRANGE. I WAS NEVER ABLE TO SO MUCH AS TOUCH ANY OF THE FRAGMENTS.
GHOUL KILLER STRIKES AGAIN!

FINISH YOUR MEAL, CHILD. WE MUST GO.
BUT... YOUR CHEST.
I WILL NOT TELL YOU AGAIN.
YES... FATHER.
CAN YOU NOT SENSE IT, CHILD?
THE BLOOD IS AWAKE.
OUR TIME... HAS COME AROUND... AT LAST.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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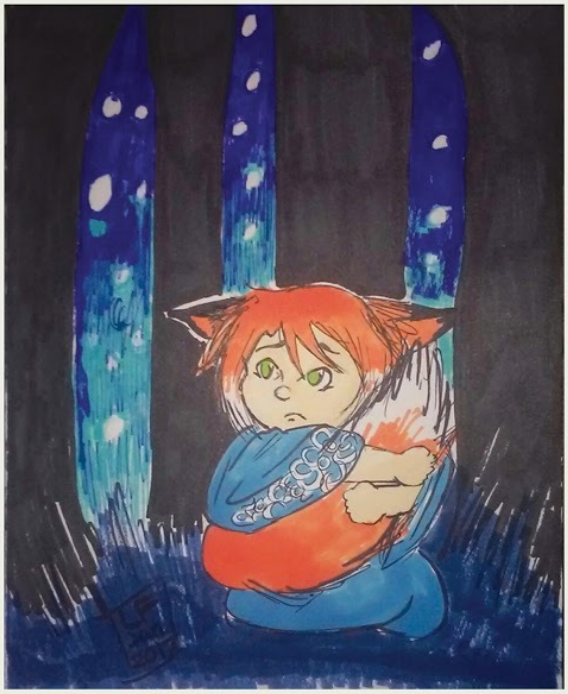

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MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 12

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